

III. The Inherent Nature of Women

(*strīsvabhāvaḥ*; Sdhp.21r.3–22r.8)¹

After instructing the virtuous wife on her duties throughout the day, Tryambaka turns to face the objection most likely to undermine his whole project. The problem is simple but devastating. If women are inherently wicked, as they are traditionally supposed to be, then how can they possibly have any interest in learning what Tryambaka is at such pains to teach them? Why does he bother to teach women at all? Tryambaka puts this question in the form of a *pūrvapakṣa*. 'The problem is (*nanu*), how can there be any (real) inclination towards receiving religious instruction (**dharmaśravane*) as described (by me above) on the part of women who are by nature corrupted (*svabhāvato duṣṭānām strīnām*)? For the inherent faults of women (*strīnām svabhāvikadoṣā[h]*) are widely recognized.'²

Tryambaka does not spell out the traditional argument for the inherent sinfulness of women; but it is clearly assumed. In his section on *snāna*, for example, he rules that twice-born men should perform the bathing ritual with mantras (*mantravat*), *sūdras* and women without (*tūṣṇīm*; section IIA, p.83, note 60; cf. Manu II. 66–7, IX.18; Yājñ.I.13; Baudh.I.5.11.7, II.2.3.46). Since being born a woman or a *sūdra* is the result of particular sins in a previous birth,³ the mere fact of femaleness is seen as the proof of sin. Being sinful, a woman is *amantravat*; being *amantravat*, she cannot purify herself of sin; she therefore remains sinful all her life. It is quite logical, therefore, to attribute all manner of innate unpleasantness to women.

The Jaina explanation for why the nineteenth Tirthankara was born a woman (Malli) makes this graphically clear. In her previous life, Malli was a king who, together with his friends, renounced the

1. An earlier version of this section, entitled 'Strīsvabhāva: The Inherent Nature of Women', is included in *Oxford University Papers on India*, Vol.1, part I, edited by N.J. Allen et al., Delhi (O.U.P. 1986). This in turn formed the basis of the much briefer paper of the same title delivered at the Sixth World Sanskrit Conference, Philadelphia, 13–20 October 1984.

2. *nanu svabhāvato duṣṭānām strīnām nirūpitadharmaśravane ca katham pravṛttiḥ // strīnām svabhāvikadoṣāś ca bahulam avagamyante //* Sdhp.21r.3–4.

3. *śubhakṛccchubhayoniṣu pāpakṛtpāpayoniṣu / upapadyati dharmajña yathā-dharmam yathāgamaḥ //* Mbh.XIII.120.9. Cf. Manu XII.3.9.

world. They agreed to undertake the same number of fasts, but the king cheated (by claiming ill health, etc.) and so outdid his friends in austerity. Since he was otherwise without fault, he was reborn a Tirthankara; since he had cheated, he was reborn a woman. Such faults as cheating, deviousness, greed and cunning are widely agreed to be the cause of a female birth (cf. *Jñātrdharmakathāsūtra* viii; cited Jaini 1979:39–40, note 93).

More commonly, however, an individual retains his or her gender in transmigration. For example, threats involving rebirth at a lower level in the hierarchy of births always specify a female animal for a female offender (e.g. section IIC, p.226, note 114; Sdhp.39v.10–40r.1, from section IV, p.288; Manu XII.72, etc.). In similes (in *kāvya*, etc.), it is also unusual to cross gender. Two conclusions may be drawn. First, since sinfulness is the mark of a female birth, the female of the species is always lower than the male. Secondly, so deeply ingrained is this sinfulness that it is more difficult for a female to be reborn as a male than it is for an animal to be reborn as a human. This is the scale of Tryambaka's problem. If sinfulness is natural to women, and so powerful in its effect in life after life, then how can mere religious instruction help?

Tryambaka begins by collecting evidence for the *pūrvapakṣa* (i.e. the *prima facie* view) he hopes to demolish. The first three *ślokas*, attributed to the *Anuśāsanaparvan* of the *Mahābhārata*, are taken from Bhīṣma's discourse to Yudhiṣṭhira on the inherent nature of women (*strīsvabhāvakathanam*; Mbh.XIII.38–9). 'Women are inherently fickle (*calasvabhāvā[h]*), difficult to manage, and in their very nature (*bhāvata[h]*) difficult to understand; as (unintelligible as) the words of a wise man, so are women.'⁴ We may note in passing that here are the bad qualities of instability and fickleness attributed to the goddess Śrī by the cows; and hence their excuse for refusing her request (section IIA, pp.60–3). The second *śloka* involves a play on words: since *māyā* ('magic', 'trickery') is a feminine noun, it is taken to be female. 'The (cunning) tricks (*māyā*) of (the demons) Śambhara, Namuci, Bali and Kumbhīnasi⁵ too—

4. *tathā cānuśāsanike // calasvabhāvā duḥsevyā durgrāhyā bhāvatas tathā / prājñasya puruṣasyeha yathā vācas tathā striyaḥ //* Sdhp.21r.4–5 (Mbh.) < Mbh.XIII.38.24.

5. Śambhara and Namuci are *asuras* of the Dānava clan (Mbh. I.59.11–12, 20–2); both were killed by Indra in the great war between the gods and the

all these they (i.e. wise men) know to be women (*yoṣit[ah]*; i.e. female).⁶ The third *śloka* is equally resounding. 'Ever since the five gross elements (were created), ever since the (three) worlds were created by the creator, ever since men and women (*pramadā[h]*; lit. "seductive" or "wanton") were fashioned—ever since then there have been faults (*doṣāḥ*) in women (*pramadāsu*).'⁷ For the sake of consistency, the next half-*śloka* is taken out of sequence. For, despite the fact that Tryambaka includes it in a later passage attributed to the *Rāmāyaṇa*, this too belongs to Bhīṣma's discourse on women in the *Mahābhārata*. '(On the one side of a balanced scale,) the edge of the razor, poison, snake(s) and fire; and on the other (i.e. equal to them), women.'⁸

Tryambaka continues with two choice quotations from Manu's ninth chapter on the religious duties relating to men and women (*strīpumdharma*). According to Tryambaka's version of these oft-quoted lines, 'they (i.e. women) are innately (*svabhāvataḥ*) promiscuous, fickle-minded, lacking in love, and unfaithful to their husbands even when closely guarded.'⁹ Furthermore, at the time of their creation, '(the original) Manu allocated to women (the habit of) lying and sitting around, (a love of) ornament, (indiscriminate) sexual desire, anger, meanness, treachery and bad conduct.'¹⁰

asuras (Mbh.III.165.19–20; III.168.18–19). Bali is an *asura* of the *daitya* clan (Mbh.I.59.11–12,20); he too was defeated by Indra in the great war (Mbh.III.165.15; III.168.20); he was also conquered by Viṣṇu in the form of a dwarf (Mbh.III.100.21; III.299.13). There is no other reference to Kumbhīnasi in the *Mahābhārata*.

6. *śambharasya ca yā māyā yā māyā namucer api // baleḥ kumbhīnaseḥ caiva sarvās tā yoṣito viduḥ //* Sdhp.21r.5–6 (Mbh.) < Mbh.XIII.39.5.

7. *yataś ca bhūtāni mahānti pañca yataś ca lokā vihitā vidhātā // yataḥ pumāṃsaḥ pramadāś ca nirmītāś tadaiva doṣāḥ pramadāsu nārada // iti //* Sdhp.21r.6–8 (Mbh.) < Mbh.XIII.38.30.

8. (*rāmāyaṇe 'pi //* Sdhp.21r.10) *kṣuradhārā viṣaṃ sarpo vahnir ity ekataḥ striyaḥ //* Sdhp. 21v.3–4 (Rām.) < Mbh.XIII.38.29b. The full *śloka* puts even more in the scales to balance the evil of women: *antakaḥ śamano mṛtyuḥ pātāḥ vadhāmukhaḥ / kṣuradhārā . . . etc.*

9. *manuḥ // pūṃścalyāś calacittāś ca nīḥśneḥś ca svabhāvataḥ / rakṣitā yātnato 'pīha bhartṛṣv etā vikurvate //* Sdhp.21r.8–9 (Manu) < Manu IX.15 (*paumścalyāś calacittāś ca naisnehyāś ca . . .*).

10. *śayyāsanam alāṅkāraṃ kāmam krodham anāryatām / drohabhāvam kucaryām ca strībhyo manur akalpayat //* Sdhp.21r.9–10 (Manu) < Manu IX.17 (*anāryavam*, 'dishonesty', for *anāryatām*; PT follows Manu).

Tryambaka's third and last source of quotations derogatory to women is the *Rāmāyaṇa*. These are culled from three separate episodes. First, Queen Kausalyā's lament to Sītā before the latter's departure to the forest with Rāma includes the bitter complaint that 'the hearts of women do not care for (good) family, (good) deeds, wisdom, gifts, or even affection, for their hearts are inconstant.'¹¹ In context, of course, Kausalyā's words compliment Sītā, whose devotion to Rāma even in adversity places her so far above the common run of women. Sītā goes further still, and begs Kausalyā not even to associate her with such wicked women.¹² The next two *ślokas* are taken from the sage Agastya's words to Rāma before he advises the prince to settle in Pañcavaṭī. Again Sītā's behaviour is contrasted with that of ordinary women. For, according to Agastya, 'this has been the nature of women (ever) since creation (began): they cling to him who prospers and abandon him who runs into difficulty.'¹³ 'For women take after (i.e. model themselves on) the fickleness of lightning flashes, the sharpness of weapons, and the speed of Garuḍa and the wind.'¹⁴ In the *Rāmāyaṇa* episode, Agastya, having made his point, exonerates Sītā from all such blame.¹⁵ Tryambaka simply quotes further criticisms of women, this time as spoken by the female ascetic Anasūyā (wife of the sage, Atri) to Sītā. She too compliments Sītā by denigrating the women who refuse to behave as she does. 'For wicked women—who do not know right from wrong in this way, and who, although dependent on their husbands for protection (*bhartṛnāthā[h]*), wander about with their hearts subject (only) to their own desires—(such women,) O Maithilī, incur disgrace and a fall from *dharma*.'¹⁶ In the context of Anasūyā's advice to Sītā, these words describe the

11. *rāmāyaṇe 'pi // na-kulam na kṛtaṃ vidyām na dattaṃ nāpi saṃgraham / strīnām gṛhṇāti hṛdayam anityahṛdayā hi tāḥ //* Sdhp.21r.10–21v.1 (Rām.) < Rām.II.39.23b,24a (*vidyā* for *vidyām*, *saṃgrahaḥ* for *saṃgraham*).

12. *na mām asajjanenāryā samānayitum arhati //* Rām.II.39.28b.

13. *eṣā hi prakṛtīḥ strīnām ā sṛṣṭe raghunandana / samastham anuraj- [y]anti viṣamastham tyajanti ca //* Sdhp.21v.1–2 (Rām.) < Rām.III.13.5.

14. *śatahradānām lolatvaṃ śastrānām tikṣṇatām tathā / garuḍānilayoh śaighryam anugacchanti yoṣitaḥ //* Sdhp.21v.2–3 (Rām.) < Rām.III.13.6.

15. *iyam tu bhavato bhāryā doṣair etair vivarjitā //* Rām.III.13.7a.

16. *ayodhyākāṇḍe sītām praty anasūyā //* Sdhp.21v.4. *na tv evam avagacchanti guṇadoṣam a[śa]striyaḥ / kāmavaktavyahṛdayā bhartṛnāthāś caranti yāḥ // prāpnuvanty ayaśaś caiva dharmabhramśam ca maithilī //* Sdhp.21v.4–6 (Rām.) < Rām.II.117.26–27a. See also Sdhp.25r.3–4, section IV.

behaviour and fate of bad women, not the inherent nature of women in general. Out of context, as presented by Tryambaka, the implication is that such is the behaviour of the majority of women.

Tryambaka ends with a well-known *śloka* on the fate in store for women who indulge their evil tendencies. 'By their breach of conduct, women who behave badly (*durvṛttāḥ*) cause their three families—of father, mother and husband—to fall, bringing them misfortune both in this world (disgrace) and in the next (bad *karma*).'¹⁷

Tryambaka concludes his case for the innate wickedness of women by directing us to his own voluminous commentary on the *Rāmāyaṇa*, the *Dharmākūta*, where, he tells us, 'further examples (of this kind) are to be found.'¹⁸ (For a brief discussion of the authorship of the *Dharmākūta*, see pp.10–13.)

The argument is resumed once more. 'If, as a result of hearing in this way about the multiplicity of faults (attributed to women), someone were to ask how women could (possibly) have any inclination towards religious duty, then the answer is (twofold): because it is understood from the words of Manu and others that they (women) have such qualities as inherent purity (*tāsām svabhāvika-śucitvādi guṇānām avagamāt*); and because it is also understood from the words of the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* that women are inherently blessed with good fortune (*strīṇām svabhāvato dhanyatvāvagamād api*).'¹⁹ Before dealing with the specific quotations provided by Tryambaka, I shall consider in more general terms the first of his two assertions.

In ascribing purity to women, Tryambaka takes the bull by the horns. For it is precisely the impurity of women that is usually assumed. There are two major reasons for this. First, there is the impurity of menstruation (see section IV, pp.283–4). This is not merely one of the twelve impurities of the body (cf. Manu V.135), but the inescapable reminder of a woman's guilt. The story of

17. *śīlabhaṅgena durvṛttāḥ pātayanti kulatrayam / pitur mātus tathā patyur ihāmūtra ca duḥkhadāḥ // iti // Sdhp.21v.6–7 (Rām.) < Sk.P.III.2.7.59 (duḥkhitāḥ for duḥkhadāḥ).* See also Sdhp.21v.3–4, from section IV.

18. *vistaras tu rāmāyaṇadharmākūte draṣṭavyaḥ // Sdhp.21v.7–8. Cf. Dharmāk.II.i.p.309.*

19. *evam daṣabāhulyaśravaṇāt katham dharme pravṛttir iti ced ucyate // ... ityādi manvādi vacanais tāsām svabhāvikaśucitvādi guṇānām avagamāt // ... iti viṣṇupurāṇavacanena strīṇām svabhāvato dhanyatvāvagamād api // Sdhp.21v.8, 22r.1, 6–7.*

Indra's brahminicide is told in the *Taittirīyasamhitā*. When Indra kills Viśvarūpa, he is condemned by the three worlds as a brahmin-killer. To escape the effects of this most heinous crime, he persuades the earth, trees and women to assume one-third of his guilt each. In return, he grants each a boon: the earth, when dug, will heal within one year; trees, when cut, will grow again; and women, unlike other animals, may enjoy sexual intercourse at any time (Tait. Sam.II.5.1ff.), even in advanced pregnancy (cf. section IV, pp.288–9). Indra's guilt took the form of fissures in the earth, sap in trees—hence one should avoid 'red secretions' and resin from cut trees (Manu V.6; cf. Tait.Sam.II.5.4)—and menstrual blood in women. In several variations on this theme, Indra distributes his brahminicide in four parts: among women, fire, trees and cows (Mbh.XII.329.28–41); among rivers, mountains, earth and women (Mbh.V.10–13); among trees, earth, women and water (Bhāg.P.VI.9.6–10). The constant recipient is women. In some texts, Indra's sin causes the recipients to become impure; in others, the recipients are already impure. For example, the guilt of Indra is offloaded onto 'foetus-killers' in the *Atharvaveda* (p.522ff.); onto sinful brahmins who serve *śūdras* and so on in the *Skandapurāṇa* (V.3.118.141); and onto those who kill brahmins in the *Rāmāyaṇa* (VIII.86.10–16). Menstruation, the sign of a woman's participation in brahmin-murder, is thus a mark of both her sexual appetite and her innate impurity (cf. O'Flaherty 1976:153ff.; for the symbolic 'menstrual pollution' of rivers and the earth, see Salomon 1984:153ff., 175–6).

Secondly, as women lost the right to Vedic education and *upanayana* (cf. Baudh.I.5.11.7; Manu IX.18; etc.), they were increasingly relegated to the level of the *śūdra*. For example, Manu gives the same rules of purification to women as to *śūdras* (V.139). Pace R.M. Das (1962:257), who claims that this verse illustrates the purity of women, what is important here is not that women only need to sip water once to become pure but that they are equated with *śūdras* (who also have to sip water once) and not with twice-born men (who must sip three times).

Again and again, women are linked with other creatures whose only common quality is impurity. As early as the *Śatapathabrāhmaṇa*, we learn that a woman, a *śūdra*, a dog and a crow are the embodiments of untruth, sin and darkness.²⁰ Since the *śūdra* is the lowest of the four classes of men, whose touch defiles (cf. Āp.

20. *anṛtaṃ strī śūdraḥ śvā kṛṣṇaḥ śakunis ... // Śat.Br.XIV.1.1.31.*

I.5.17.1 and Har. comm.), and since dogs and crows are always regarded as unclean (cf. Āp.I.5.15.16, I.5.16.30; Baudh.I.6.14.15; Viṣ.Sm.XXIII.38; etc.), the implication is that women too are impure. Even Manu's claim that a woman's mouth is always pure,²¹ so often quoted out of context (e.g. Das 1962:257), is something of a back-handed compliment (cf. Manu IV.208). For the verse clearly states the peculiar circumstances in which what is otherwise regarded as impure may be considered pure: a woman's mouth for the purpose of kissing (*cumbanāḍau, paricumbanāḍau*, Sarv., Rāgh., Medh. on Manu V.130; *cumbanāliṅganāḍau*, Nand. on Viṣ.Sm.XXIII.49); fruit that has fallen as a result of a bird (glossed as 'crows, etc.') pecking it; the flesh of a deer seized by (the hunter's) dog (Manu V.130 and commentaries; Viṣ.Sm.XXIII.49; cf. Vas.XXVIII.8). Viṣ.Sm.XXIII.50 expands upon the last point, explaining that the meat of an animal killed by dogs, or by any other carnivorous animals (glossed as 'tigers, jackals, birds of prey, etc.'), or by such as *caṇḍālas* (glossed as 'outcastes and hunters'), is pure. Tryambaka's claim that women are innately pure is therefore by no means obvious.

He supports the claim in two ways. In doing so, he wisely avoids the pitfalls of comparing women with men: the beliefs surrounding sexual difference make that a fruitless approach. Instead, he produces evidence for a purity that is, by its very nature, peculiar to women.

First, he alludes to the traditional view, encapsulated in the Vedic marriage hymn (*vivāhasūkta*; R.V.X.85), that the marriage ceremony celebrates not the young girl's first marriage, but her fourth. Her previous three marriages are on the transcendent or symbolic plane.²² As the *vivāhasūkta* explains, Soma acquired her first, then the Gandharva, Agni was her third husband, her fourth is born of

21. *nityam āsyam śuci strīṇām* ... // Manu V. 130a; Viṣ.Sm.XXIII.49a (Nand. quotes Latigabārhaspati, *smṛtyantara* and *Yamasṁṛti* in support of the purity of women). Cf. Br.Sam.73.8 (the feet of brahmins, the backs of cows, the faces of goats and horses are pure; but women are pure all over); Vas.XXVIII.9.

22. For other sets of four items of which three are invisible and transcendent and only the fourth is visible here on earth (e.g. *purusa*, R.V.X.90; *vāk*, R.V.I.164.45; and the sacred fires, Tait.Sam.II.6.6.1, Śat.Br.I.2.3.1), see Malamoud 1982:36.

man (*manuṣyajāh*).²³ The three deities are the divine guardians of the young girl. According to Sāyaṇa, Soma marries the girl child at birth (*jātām kanyām*; Sāy. on R.V.X.85.40), for the moon is the deity of early growth, who 'moulds the years' (*samānām*, glossed as *saṃvatsarānām*; *māsa ākṛtiḥ*, glossed as *kartā*; R.V.X.85.5 and Sāy.). The Gandharva is the deity of childhood and virginity (cf. R.V.X.85.21–2). Agni is the god of maturity, dwelling in the sacred fire round which the bride must walk. According to the *Grhyasamgraha* (quoted in the commentary on the Gobh.gr.III.4.6 statement that a bride should be *nagnikā*), Soma enjoys her first, the Gandharva, when her breasts develop, Agni when she menstruates. Alternatively, in the words of Saṃvārta 64 (cf. Sm.C.I.p.79), Soma enjoys a girl when hair begins to grow on her body, the Gandharva when she menstruates, Agni when her breasts develop. Each in turn 'marries' the girl, enjoys her favours, rewards her, then passes her on (R.V.X.85.41a). By the time the girl reaches her fourth husband, therefore, she is the recipient of three divine gifts. As Tryambaka intones of women in general (in a quotation attributed vaguely to 'Manu, etc.'), 'Soma gave them cleanliness (*śaucam*), the Gandharva an auspicious (or pure; *śubham*) tongue (lit. "speech" or "voice"), Agni all-round purity (*sarvamedhyatvam*); and therefore women are pure (*medhyā*) indeed.'²⁴ The commentators on Yājñ.I.71 stress that this does not mean that women are without fault (Mit.); nor that their sins are less serious than those of a man (Bāl.); it merely explains why the penalties incurred by women are lighter (Mit., Bāl.). But it is a powerful *śloka*, often called to the defence of women: by Rāghavānanda to enlarge upon Manu's dictum that a woman's mouth is always pure (Manu V.130); by Viśvarūpa to show that, unlike men, women, being pure in body, speech and mind, are free from sin;²⁵ by Aparārka in praise of women (Dh.kośa I.ii.1086). In Sm.C.I.p.79, however, the *śloka* is

23. *somaḥ prathamo vivide gandharvo vivida uttarah / tṛtīyo agniḥ te patis turīyas te manuṣyajāh* // R.V.X.85.40. Cf. Pār.gr.I.4.16–17.

24. *somaḥ śaucam dadau tāsām gandharvas tu śubham giram / pāvakas sarvamedhyatvam medhyā vai yoṣito hy atah* // Sdhp.21v.8–9 (Manu etc.) < Yājñ.I.71 (*dadav āsām*; ca for tu). Cf. Baudh.II.2.4.5; Vas.XXVIII.5–6.

25. *yasmāt somādibhir āsām śaucam manovākkāyalakṣaṇam dattam, tasman nirdoṣā evaitāh / pumsām eva niyogakartrṇām doṣa ity abhiprāyah* // Dh.kośa I.ii.1086 (Viśvarūpa's comm. on Yājñ.I.71).

declared to be 'only in praise of women' (*praśamsāmātram*), meaning that the allusions to ritual purity (*sarvayajñārhatvam*) are purely rhetorical (cf. Br.Saṃ.73.7 for a similar verse).

This important *śloka* is often adduced as evidence for another quite different issue, that of the early marriage of girls (see my discussion of *nagnikā* in section IIA, pp.86–8; cf. Thieme 1971). As the symbolism stands, however, it seems obvious that a girl was expected to marry her human bridegroom *after* receiving the signs and gifts of the three gods; that is, after her breasts had developed and she had begun to menstruate. But the obvious is repeatedly ignored. According to the *Jyotir nibāṇḍha*, for example, two years should be allowed for each deity, and therefore a girl should not marry until she is six years old (Vidyānava 1974). Similarly, Saṃvārta 67 concludes that a girl should be safely married off before she develops any of the three signs of femaleness already described as indications of her divine marriages (see Saṃvārta 64, cited above); preferably at the age of eight.²⁶ Although such interpretations are clearly distortions of the text, it is evident that something very like them is accepted by Tryambaka. For if he acknowledged the real import of the Rgvedic verse he quotes (and thus the need for girls to marry *after* menstruation), then he would not feel the need to defend *ṛtukāladharma* with such vigour (see section IV, pp.287–8). For a detailed analysis of R.V.X.85 in its Rgvedic context, including a useful discussion of these three celestial 'husbands' or 'guardians' of the bride, see Menski 1984:II, §3.1, pp. 219–83.

Tryambaka's second argument for the purity of women tackles the important question of menstruation. Far from being the mark of great sin, menstruation, according to his next quotation (also attributed to 'Manu, etc.'), is the mark of an all-encompassing purity unique to women. 'Women are incomparably pure; at no time are they defiled; for menstruation sweeps away their sins month after month.'²⁷ In fact, this is the classic argument not for the

26. *romakāle tu samprāpte somo bhuñktetha kanyakām / rajo dr̥ṣṭvā tu gandharvāḥ kucau dr̥ṣṭvā tu pāvakaḥ // ... tasmād vivāhayet kanyām yāvan na rtumatī bhavet / vivāho hy aṣṭavarṣāyāḥ kanyāyās tu praśasyate //* Saṃvārta 64 and 67, quoted Sm.C.I.p.79.

27. *striyaḥ pavitram atulam naitā duṣyanti karhicit / māsi māsi rajo hy āsām dūritāny apakarṣati //* Sdhp.21v.9–10 (Manu etc.) < Baudh.II.2.4.4.; Vas.XXVIII.4. Cf. Vas.V.5; Yājñ.I.72; Br.Saṃ.73.9.

purity of women *per se* but for the proper treatment of women who have become 'defiled' by contact with other men (e.g. *Baudhāyana-vivaraṇam*, Dh.kośa I.ii.1085). Vas.XXVIII.2–3 includes in this category women who have been raped or carried off by thieves, as well as those who are merely bad-tempered or who have left home. In a *śloka* recalling the story of Indra's brahminicide, Manu V.108 asserts that menstruation purifies women of impure thoughts (glossed by Medh. as 'thinking about other men').²⁸ Early *dharma-śāstra* writers took a similar view of a wife's adultery, ruling that she should be abandoned only if she continued to go astray (cf. Par. Sm.X.34), or if she conceived (cf. Yājñ.I.72; *garbhena duṣyate kanyā*, Mbh.XIII.36.17). Some writers, like Aparārka, insist that such lenient passages refer only to 'mental' rather than physical adultery (*etac ca mānase vyabhicāre*; Apar. on Yājñ. I.72). This point of view makes progeny not sexual fidelity its main concern. 'Physical' adultery is doubly reprehensible for it may both deprive a man of the son he needs for religious observances and lead to confusion of class (*varṇasaṃkara*; Manu VIII.353).

Notwithstanding his insistence here on the innate purity of women, Tryambaka belongs to the sterner school of thought. Although he does not deal specifically with adultery, he has included many of the familiar *ślokas* on the subject in his section on *ṛtukāladharma* (section IV, pp.287–8). (Chief among these is the pronouncement that the wife who 'offends against' (*laṅghayet*) her husband should be devoured by dogs in a public place (Sdhp.38r. 2–3 < Manu VIII.371). Similarly, in his section on dying with one's husband (*sahagamanavidhi*), Tryambaka embarks on a lengthy discussion of whether or not *sahagamana* may be regarded as a *prāyaścitta* or rite of atonement for women who have behaved badly (even in a non-sexual sense). He concludes that there is no such *prāyaścitta* for women; that there is therefore no escaping the penalties awaiting such a woman in hell; and thus that women would be well-advised to behave (see section IV, pp.295–7). In view of these two quite separate judgements, it is hard to see what power of purity other than the symbolic might be conferred by the menstrual flow of women. Tryambaka's concern, however, is not to present a coherent view of how women fit into the cosmic scheme

28. *mṛttoyaiḥ śudhyate śodhyam nadī vegena śudhyati / rajasā strī mano-duṣṭā saṃnyāseṇa dvijottamaḥ //* Manu V.108.

of things, but to persuade women to conform. Hence his problem: he must show on the one hand that women are in dire need of religious instruction, and on the other that they have not fallen too low to appreciate and apply it.

Having established a woman's peculiar claim to purity, Tryambaka must also demonstrate that she is inherently and uniquely blessed (see note 19). Such a view is clearly not in line with orthodox beliefs about *karma* and sexual difference. If birth as a woman is the result of bad *karma*, and birth as a (twice-born) man that of good *karma*, in what sense can one argue that the former is more fortunate than the latter? It would be like saying that being born a *śūdra*, although strictly speaking the penalty for bad *karma* in a previous life, is in fact a greater blessing than birth as a *dvija*. This seems especially unlikely with regard to brahmins who by the mere fact of their birth are to be honoured by the gods (Manu XI.84); who own everything by virtue of their innate superiority (Manu I.100); who are gods visible here on earth, maintaining both the universe and the gods in heaven (Viṣ.Śm.XIX.20–2); who are the highest beings in the whole world (Mbh.XII.56.22); and so on.

But this is precisely what Tryambaka claims. He draws his evidence from a passage in the sixth book of the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*. Since the quotation he gives is both incomplete and out of context, it will be useful to present a fuller version of the story here. Book V of the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* ends with the destruction of the Yādavas. Book VI describes the dissolution of the universe and the onset of the *kali* age in which 'four-footed virtue' is destroyed (*dharmas catuṣpād*, VI.1.8; cf. also Kūrm.P.I.27.20; Manu 1.81–2 and Kull.; *vr̥ṣo hi bhagavān dharmah*, Manu VIII.16). Chapter 1 describes the degeneration of all things in the *kali* age: the rules of *varṇa* and *āśrama* are no longer observed (Viṣ.P.VI.1.10); people take what texts they choose as scripture, worship whatever gods they please (Viṣ.P.I.14), decide for themselves what is right (Viṣ.P.VI.1.15); men of all levels consider themselves equal to brahmins (Viṣ.P.VI.1.23); women are fickle, short, greedy, disobedient, selfish, immoral, and so on and so forth (*lolupā hrasvadehās ca bahvannādanataparāh* . . . ; Viṣ.P.VI.1.28–31). According to another description of the *kali* age, women will have too many children (*bahuprajāḥ*), be short of stature (*hrasvadehāḥ*), cast off all morals (*śilācāravivarjitāḥ*), have intercourse through the mouth (*mukhebhagāḥ*), bristle with hair (*keśasūlāḥ*), and fornicate with slaves and even animals (Mbh. III.186.35–6, 55; cf. Kūrm.P.I.28.140). Perhaps as an antidote to

this, chapter 2 of the *Viṣṇupurāṇa* recounts in the form of a story the few redeeming properties of this degenerate age (cf. Br.P.229.15–36; PVK V.ii.928–30; Wilhelm 1982:1–17).

The story runs as follows. Some sages were unable to agree in which of the four ages the least merit accrued the greatest reward, and by whom that reward was most easily obtained. They went to Veda-Vyāsa, found him in the midst of his ablutions, and waited. Three times, Vyāsa immersed himself. As he rose the first time, he pronounced the *kali* age excellent;²⁹ as he rose the second time, he congratulated the *śūdra* on being blessed;³⁰ and as he rose the third time, he exclaimed that no one was more blessed than women. But once again, it is a back-handed compliment that praises someone or something in the company of other people or things not normally praised. His bathing ritual over, the sages asked him to explain these apparently extraordinary pronouncements. Vyāsa's answer is characteristic of the purāṇic ideal. The *kali* age is the best in that it is the easiest age in which to achieve religious merit: what in the *kr̥ta* age takes ten years of *tapas*, *brahmacarya* and *japa* may be achieved in the *kali* age in one day and night; the results obtained by meditation in the *kr̥ta* age, by sacrifice in the *treta* age, by worship in the *dvāpara* age, may be attained in the *kali* age merely by reciting the name of Viṣṇu (Viṣ.P.VI.2.15–17). The *śūdra* is blessed because none of the restrictions on the *dvija* (i.e. years of study and self-denial, costly sacrifices, strict rules governing food, etc.), apply to him; he has only to serve the twice-born to obtain his reward (Viṣ.P.VI.2.22–3). The case for women is much the same.

Tryambaka quotes only the parts of this story that refer to women. The somewhat mutilated passage reads as follows. 'The great sage immersed himself, rose up once more and said: "Women are supremely blessed (*sādhudhanyā[ḥ]*). Who is more blessed than them?"'³¹ Tryambaka explains that 'when they heard Vyāsa's words, the sages asked him what he meant and Vyāsa replied . . .'³² The quotation continues with the relevant parts of Vyāsa's answer. 'Since, O twice-born men, a woman who is of benefit to her hus-

29. *vyāsah sādhuh kalih sādhu ity eva śṛṇvatām tataḥ* // Viṣ.P.VI.2.6b.

30. *utthāya sādhu sādhu iti śūdra dhanyāsi cābravit* // Viṣ.P.VI.2.7b.

31. *nimagnaś ca samutthāya punaḥ prāha mahāmuniḥ / yoṣitaḥ sādhu-dhanyās tās tābhyo dhanyataro 'sti kaḥ* // Sdhp.22r.1–2 (Viṣ.P.) < Viṣ.P.VI.2.8 (sa nimagnaḥ for nimagnaś ca).

32. *iti vyāsavacanam śrutvā ko 'syārtha iti praśṅg munin prati vyāsah* // Sdhp.22r. 2–3 (PT amends *praśṅg* to *prṣṭavato*).

band by serving him in thought, word and deed, will come to dwell in the same heaven as he does³³—that is, (she can attain) those same (worlds) as a man (can but) without enormous effort—that is why I said the third time about women that they are blessed.³⁴ Vyāsa concludes the episode: 'Dharma is fulfilled in the *kali* age with very little effort³⁵ (. . . and) by women without effort merely by serving their husbands. And that is why, the third time, I considered these (three; i.e. the *kali* age, the *śūdra* and women) to be most blessed (*dhanyataram*).³⁶

Tryambaka's purpose here is clear. He wishes to demonstrate first, that women are not beyond religious instruction; secondly, that they are to be envied for the ease and efficacy of the religious duty allotted to them. But if we examine this evidence in its purāṇic context, there is a serious contradiction here. For the *purāṇas* introduced several striking changes into the religious ideals and practices of the post-Vedic era. The notion that the highest rewards can be attained by the least effort is typical. But if, as Vyāsa declares, repeating the name of Viṣṇu has replaced the *tapas*, *brahmacarya* and so on of the *dvija*, why has it not also replaced the *dvijaśuśrūṣaṇam* of the *śūdra* and the *patīśuśrūṣaṇam* of women? *Bhakti*, if it is allowed at all, supersedes the obligations of both *svadharma* and *sanātana-dharma*. By *bhakti*, Harikeśa sidesteps the *svadharma* of the *yakṣa* (cf. Matsy.P.180.5ff.; Sk.P.IV.32.1–175); Sukeśin that of the *rākṣasa*. Vām.P.11–16 describes how the latter, a king of demons (11.7), sought advice from holy sages regarding the duties specific to each class of beings (11.14–27). He is told of the

33. *yā strī śuśrūṣanād bhartuḥ karmanā manasā girā / taddhitā samavāpnoti tatsālokyam yato dvijāḥ* // Sdhp.22r.3–4 (Viṣ.P.) < Viṣ.P.VI.2.28 (*yoṣit śuśrūṣaṇam bhartuḥ karmanā manasā girā / kurvatī samavāpnoti tatsālokyam yato dvijāḥ* //).

34. *nātikleśena mahatā tām eva puruṣo yathā / tṛtīyam vyāhṛtaṁ tena mayā sādhu iti yoṣitām* // Sdhp.22r.4–5 (Viṣ.P.) < Viṣ.P.VI.2.29 (*yoṣitaḥ* for *yoṣitām*).

35. *sva-lpenaiva prayatnena dharmāḥ sidhyati vai kalau* (Viṣ.P.VI.2.34a). This and the next two half-ślokas (concerning the *kali* age in general and *śūdras* in particular; vital to the sense of the original passage) are omitted in Sdhp..

36. *tathā strībhir anāyāsāt patīśuśrūṣayaiva hi / tatas tṛtīyam apy etan mama dhanyataram mata[m]* // Sdhp.22r.5–6 (Viṣ.P.) < Viṣ.P.VI.2.35b, 36a (*tṛtīyam* for *tṛtīyam*, *dhanyataram* for *dhanyataram*).

dharma prescribed for *daityas* (11.16) and *rākṣasas* (11.26). After a discourse on the actions leading to hell (remarkably similar to the *dharma* of demons, 12.1–43), the sages list the 'ten-limbed' *sanātana-dharma* prescribed for all (14.1). Sukeśin returns to his city of demons and commands them all to practise *sanātana-dharma* (16.1–4) and *bhakti* (16.19). Angered by the demons' deviation from their ordained *svadharma* (16.34–7), Sūrya destroys their city (16.38–9). Sukeśin is saved by the intervention of Siva, who thus effectively upholds *bhakti* against *svadharma*. But despite his purāṇic quotations, Tryambaka is not of the purāṇic mould. His rigid codification of *strīdharmā* places him firmly in the orthodox post-Vedic age. He uses Vyāsa's pronouncements solely to prove that women are not beyond redemption; the implications of the comments on the *kali* age simply do not apply.

For Tryambaka, *patīśuśrūṣaṇam* is not only the most effective religious observance for women; it is the only one. His section on things to be avoided makes this abundantly clear. Not only may a woman not worship any god other than her husband, but she is also forbidden to engage in any religious observance other than devotion to him. Here Tryambaka declares only that women are blessed with the easiest path to heaven; there he intones that any alternative or additional observance will 'cause them to fall' (see section IV, pp.274–6, note 7). Such pronouncements dismiss the claims of *bhakti* altogether: women must conform to the functions prescribed. For the moment, however, the emphasis is on the unique blessing that a female birth confers. In view of this, Tryambaka concludes that 'it is indeed reasonable (to suppose) that there is an interest (on the part of women) both in receiving instruction in their religious duties and in performing them.'³⁷

Tryambaka's insistence on the blessings of being born a woman recalls the story of king Bhaṅgāśvana, whose success and happiness so irritates Indra that the god transforms him into a woman (Mbh. III.12). Leaving his family and his kingdom, the female Bhaṅgāśvana retires to the forest where she produces another family with an ascetic living there. Indra causes the two sets of children to quarrel

37. *iti dharmānām śravaṇe tadācarane ca pravṛttir yuktaiva* // Sdhp.22r.8. Unlike PT, I have followed the scribe's inversion marks and restored the intended order to Sdhp.22r.7–8 (cf. note 41), incl. the marginal insertion of *iti* at the beginning.

and kill each other. The carnage complete, he gives Bhaṅgāśvana the opportunity of reviving one set of children, Bhaṅgāśvana chooses the children she has produced as a woman on the grounds that the love of a woman is greater than that of a man (Mbh.XIII.12.42). When Indra then offers to transform her back into a man, Bhaṅgāśvana refuses. She prefers to remain in her female form because she has found that women always experience greater pleasure in sexual intercourse than men (Mbh.XIII.12.47).³⁸ This is an interesting story in the context of *strīdharmā* for it makes a virtue of the much-maligned sexuality of women. For example, the usual assertions are that the sexual drive is stronger and more destructive in women (e.g. Mbh.XIII.20.59–60, 64–7); that sex, the cause of death in the world, is the direct result of the passionate nature of women (e.g. Mār.P.49.28–9); that the origin of evil itself is directly linked to the sexual passion of women (e.g. Mbh.XIII.40.5–12). Even Tryambaka's argument that women are uniquely blessed does not extend to a defence of female sexuality. For, as we have seen, he does not take issue with Manu's statement that women are innately promiscuous and oversexed (see note 9). For Tryambaka's purposes at this point, the story of Bhaṅgāśvana would be counterproductive.

Tryambaka's third and final argument in support of his thesis that women can benefit from religious instruction is simply that even bad people can improve. He takes as his scriptural proof the famous (but here unattributed) saying that 'good conduct destroys inauspicious mark(s)'.³⁹ The complete *śloka*, taken from Manu's section on rules for the *snātaka*, maintains that good conduct makes all things possible—long life, the desired offspring, inexhaustible wealth—thereby annihilating the inauspicious potential (*alakṣaṇam*) of one's nature or circumstance.⁴⁰ Sarvajñanārāyaṇa and Rāmacandra gloss *alakṣaṇam* as *alakṣmīm* ('misfortune'); Rāghavānanda as *ninditarogaparadārādisevanam* ('culpable diseases and a fondness for the wives of other men', i.e. both physical and behavioural defects; cf. Manu XI.48–54). Such defects cause those

38. *striyās tv abhyadhikāḥ sneho na tathā puruṣasya vai* // Mbh.XIII.12.42a. *striyāḥ puruṣasamyoge prītir abhyadhikā sadā* // Mbh.XIII.12.47b.

39. *ācāro hantī alakṣaṇam* // Sdhp.22r.7 < Manu IV.156; Vas.VI.8; Viṣ.Sm.LXXI.91 (Adyar edn., Mysore MS).

40. *ācārāḥ labhate hy āyur ācārād īpsitāḥ prajāḥ / ācārād dhanam akṣayyam ācāro hantī alakṣaṇam* // Manu IV.156.

who have them to be despised by good people (Manu XI.53); if they are not expiated in this life, one is reborn with 'culpable characteristics' (*ninditair lakṣanair*; Manu XI.54). However, according to Manu, good conduct produces good effects even if one lacks all auspicious marks (*sarvalakṣaṇahīno 'pi*; Manu IV.158), even—to return to the context of *strīdharmā*—if one has the misfortune to be born a woman. Tryambaka's version of all this runs as follows. 'Because of the saying that "good conduct destroys inauspicious mark(s)", it is indeed possible (for women) by virtue of their good conduct (i.e. as a result of religious instruction) to give up the (inherent) faults (traditionally and rightly) ascribed to them.'⁴¹

This is the orthodox view of *svadharma*. In the story of the worm that makes its way back up the scale of births (*kūṭopākhyānam*; Mbh.XIII.118–20), the moral is that good conduct produces auspicious births, evil conduct evil births. And good conduct is defined as that appropriate to one's birth (Mbh.XIII.120.9). Thus a *kṣatriya* who performs his duty well (*vr̥ttaślāghī*, i.e. who is praised for conduct appropriate to his station; Mbh.XIII.119.23) becomes a brahmin. For women, who cannot purify themselves by mantras or worship other gods, *strīdharmā* is the only hope. If they fulfil the requirements prescribed, they may be rewarded by being reborn as men, perhaps even as *dvija* men blessed with the right to recite mantras. Granted this means of purification, they may then aspire to better and better births. In the meantime, however, *strīdharmā* must be their only goal.

Tryambaka's contribution to the debate on *strīsvabhāva* is not to be found in any one point, but rather in his juxtaposition of negative and positive statements about women in an attempt to make sense of the inherent contradictions. The more usual approach is to keep the negative and positive quite separate, and not to admit of a contradiction at all. Hence we find eulogies of exemplary individuals or the ideal roles of wife and mother in one place, and denunciations of wicked individuals or the wickedness of women in general somewhere else.

Manu, for example, tells us that one's daughter is the highest object of one's affection (Manu IV.185, among the rules for *snātakas*); that one's sister and aunts deserve the same respect as one's

41. *nirūpitadoṣānām tu ācāro hantī alakṣaṇam iti vacanāt sadācāreṇa nirvṛtīḥ sambhavati* // iti // Sdhp.2r.7–8. Cf. note 37.

mother (Manu II.133, among the rules for students); that one owes one's mother-in-law the respect due to the *guru*'s wife (Manu II.131; cf. Manu IV.183); that one's mother is a thousand times more venerable than one's father, a hundred thousand times more so than an *ācārya* (Manu II.145; cf. Manu II.227). Elsewhere, however, he warns that even a learned man should take care when in the company of a woman, even his own mother, sister or daughter, for it is the nature of women to seduce men (Manu II.213–15; cf. Manu IX.14–17). As Tryambaka's examples show, the *Rāmāyaṇa* is dotted with derogatory references to women and yet exorbitant praise of such as Sitā (see notes 11–18). In the *Mahābhārata*, Draupadī is praised for her management of husbands and household (Mbh.III.222–4; cf. section IV, pp.280–1); and celebrated as the 'salvation of the sons of Pāṇdu' after she has rescued her husbands from the consequences of the ill-fated dice-game (Mbh.II.64.2). Kuntī is honoured as the ideal long-suffering mother (e.g. Mbh.I.138.15–19), Gāndhārī as the embodiment of intelligence and justice (e.g. Mbh.II.66.28ff.), Sulabhā for her wisdom (Mbh.XIII.308), and so on. Yet when the nature of women comes under discussion—as, for example, in the *strīsvabhāvakathanam* recounted to Yudhiṣṭhira by Bhīṣma (Mbh.XIII.38)—then women are the root of all evils, nothing is more wicked than women.⁴² Occasionally, positive and negative are juxtaposed with somewhat startling effect, as when a *nāga*'s wife, already described as obedient, dutiful and virtuous, is asked if she has neglected her duties 'due to being weakened by the imperfect understanding natural to women' (*akṛtārthena strībuddhyā mārdaṇīkṛta*; Mbh.XII.347.2–4). But even then, the implicit contradiction is neither stressed nor explained.

At the heart of this confusion is a barely examined but radical distinction between the wicked nature of women (*strīsvabhāva*) and the virtuous behaviour of wives (*strīdharma*). This distinction is never explicitly made in any rulings on *strī*, not even in a text like the *Strīdharmapaddhati*. But the stress on wifely occupations and duties, and the total lack of interest in the woman except as wife (e.g. in her childhood, her education, the occupations open to her before marriage, etc.) clearly imply that all notions of 'woman'

42. *striyo hi mūlaṃ doṣānām* // Mbh.XIII.38.1b, 12b. *na strībhyah kimcid anyad vai pāpīyastaram asti vai* // Mbh.XIII.38.12a. Cf. notes 4, 6, 7.

should be submerged in the ideal of 'wife'. This is true even when the husband is away (see section IV, p.291), or has died (see section IV, pp.291–8, 298–304). Thus any part of 'woman' that diverges from the ideal 'wife' is due to her wicked nature and to be condemned. This makes sense of such examples as that of the *nāga* who praises his dutiful wife yet condemns her woman's nature. It also explains why the two topics are usually treated separately; why the *strīsvabhāvakathanam* is a tirade of abuse (Mbh.XIII.38) while the discourses on the duties of women present models of patience and virtue (e.g. Mbh.XIII.124, 134). If the two can be opposed, conflict and argument are clearly possible. But can they logically be opposed?

In its widest, cosmic sense, *dharma* is the law of the universe, the fundamental order sustaining the world, inherent in the very nature of things. Both descriptive and prescriptive, it indicates both what is and what ought to be, the real and the ideal. In the realm of individual action, therefore, it embraces both what one does and what one ought to do. The *kṣatriya*, for example, should and does fight; the *vaiśya* should and does engage in business. Each individual's action, defined by birth and circumstance, is his duty; it was ordained to be so and is therefore right. At this level, there is no conflict: individual *dharma* is simply the reflection of cosmic law.

But two areas of conflict emerge in relation to the *dharma* of women: the potential clash between *strīdharma* and *sanātana* *dharma* (see section V, pp.309–12); and a confusion within the notion of *svadharma* itself. In the case of men, *svadharma* is usually taken to mean the specific duties laid down by *varṇa* and *āśrama*. According to Medhātithi and Kullūka (on Manu II.25), *svadharma* is of five kinds: that of *varṇa*; that of *āśrama*; that of *varṇa* and *āśrama* combined; that arising from a particular cause or occasion (*nai-mittikadharma*; such as that appropriate for the purification of something, *dravyasuddhyādi*, Medh.; or the rules of expiation, *prāyaścittavidhi*, Kull.); and that inherent in having a particular quality or characteristic (*guṇadharma*). According to Kullūka, *guṇadharma* is that which accrues because of a quality; for example, the quality of being a king (i.e. one responsible for his subjects) gives rise to the protection of those subjects.⁴³ But there is surely no

43. *yo guṇena pravarteta guṇadharmah sa ucyate | yathā mūrdhābhiṣīkṭasya prajānām paripālanam* // Kull. on Manu II.25.

conflict here. For the inherent nature of an individual, his *svabhāva*, is the source of his *dharma*, not a temptation away from it. Thus the *śūdra*, even if freed by his master, is not released from servitude because this is innate in him⁴⁴ and was ordained (cf. Manu VIII. 413). The *śūdra*'s servile nature impels him to serve; the king's regal nature impels him to rule, fight and protect. As the *Bhagavadgītā* declares, a man must act according to his 'nature' (*prakṛti*), however wise he is.⁴⁵ His *svabhāva* is thus both his character and his duty, both what is and what is right.

So why is this not true of women? Why is it consistently assumed that a woman's *svabhāva* will entice her away from her duty instead of reinforcing or defining it? In what sense can the *svabhāva* of women alone be in opposition to their *svadharmā*, and therefore bad?

Perhaps the treatment of kings is the nearest parallel to that of women. Manu exhorts the king to control his senses at all times (Manu VII.44), in particular to beware of the ten evil tendencies that arise from the love of pleasure (*kāma*) and the eight that arise from anger (*krodha*). The former (*kāma*) covers hunting (*mṛgayā*), gambling (*akṣa*), sleeping in the day (*divāsvapna*), censure (*parivāda*), women (*striyaḥ*), drunkenness (*mada*), the three kinds of music (*tauryatrika*; i.e. song, dance and instrumental music), and frivolous or fruitless travel (*vr̥thātyā*; Manu VII.45,47). The denunciation of women here is in fact a warning against excessive sexual indulgence and, perhaps, the snares of domestic life. This is a typical example of how women are treated: not as individuals, but as symbols of all that is considered bad about sex and the family. The latter (*krodha*) covers scandal-mongering (*paiśunya*), violence (*sāhasa*), treachery (*droha*), envy (*īrṣyā*), slander (*asūyā*), seizure of property (*arthadūṣaṇa*), and verbal and physical assault (*vāk-*, *daṇḍapāruṣya*; Manu VII.48). Out of these, Manu isolates the seven worst — drunkenness, gambling, women and hunting (due to *kāma*); physical and verbal assault, and the unlawful seizure of property (due to *krodha*) — and describes them as 'prevalent everywhere'.⁴⁶ Thus, in the *Mahā-*

44. *na svāmīnā nīrṣṭo 'pi śūdro dāsyād vimucyate / nisargajam hi tat tasya kas tasmāt tad apohati* // Manu VIII.414.

45. *sadr̥ṣam ceṣṭate svasyāḥ prakṛter jñānavān api / prakṛtim yānti bhūtāni nigrahaḥ kim kariṣyati* // Gītā III.33.

46. *sarvatraivānuṣaṅgināḥ* (Manu VII.52), glossed by Kull. as *sarvasminn eva rājamaṇḍale prāyeṇāvasthitasya*, 'generally established in the entourage of every king'. Cf. Mit. on Yājñ. I.309–11.

bhārata, Vikarna seems to be excusing Yudhiṣṭhira when he says that gambling is one of the four vices (*vyasanāni*) of kings (Mbh. II. 61.20). Similarly, Carstairs describes how, in his village in Rajasthan, the Rajputs hold riotous parties at which *daru* is drunk 'till they become senseless' and summonses are sent to the 'drummer-girls'. Such behaviour, clearly a lapse of self-restraint, is seen as intrinsic to the *svabhāva* of their class: as one Rajput confesses, 'That is what Rajputs are like . . . uneducated, uncivilised, lusty men' (Carstairs 1971:109–10).

But the parallel with women is not exact. For Manu is merely stating the dangers inherent in the powers of kingship, and thus the pitfalls to be avoided by the conscientious king. Despite the many scriptural examples of such kingly behaviour (*parakṛti*, see note 53), neither Manu nor Kauṭilya ever state that kings are 'by nature' drunkards, gamblers, lechers, abusers of people and property, and so on. In Kaut. I.6.1–12, a sixfold classification of evil tendencies (lit. *ariṣadvarga*; 'enemies') that a king should cast out is illustrated by twelve examples (two of each), drawn largely from the *Mahābhārata* and the *purāṇas*. In each case, the king and his kingdom perish; in none of them is any generalization made about the inherent nature of kings. The problems awaiting the king are those inherent in his function; hence the warnings. Those awaiting women are inherent in their nature; hence the condemnation. However, the line between the dangers inherent in a function and the inherent characteristics of one who holds that function is far from clear, even in the case of kings.

The problem occurs when one's nature somehow fails to coincide with one's function. Normally, there is no problem. Certainly, *dharmaśāstra* does not admit of one. But if we look beyond the codification of *dharmaśāstra* to the vaguer realms of purāṇic mythology, the problem is there. For example, a cruel and devious nature is appropriate in the demon whose function is to obstruct the gods. As O'Flaherty explains, this is at first a purely structural opposition between the gods and the demons. Gods and demons are 'separate but equal': each does his own job; the gods encourage sacrifice, the demons destroy it. Later literature develops the moral emphasis: it is still true that the demons are only doing their job, but they are evil nonetheless (O'Flaherty 1976:64–5). Similarly, promiscuity is acceptable in the *apsaras* whose function is to seduce both men and gods. Thus Menakā, who is described as 'distinguish- ed in the divine qualities of the *apsaras*' (*guṇair divyair apsarasām . . .*

viśisyase), is sent by Indra to seduce Viśvāmitra away from his ascetic activities (Mbh.I.65.20ff.). When Viśvāmitra, falling for her charms, lusts after her, the *apsaras* is 'blamelessly willing' (*sa cāpy aicchad aninditā*; Mbh.I.66.7). For nature is appropriate to function; and both, being the result of *karma*, are ordained. Hence the whole of creation — including *yakṣa*, *rākṣasa*, *apsaras* and *asura* — is ordained to be as it is, each according to his or her *karma* (*yathā-karma*; Manu I.37.41).

But what if the demon wants to be good; for example, the demon king Bali who rules virtuously in hell (Vām.P.49.1–14); or Prahlāda, the pious demon who respects brahmins (Mbh.XII.124.19–63)? Both must be stopped. What if the *apsaras* aspires to the role of wife; for example, Urvaśī who becomes for a while the wife of Purūravas (R.V.X.95)? Such is the anomalous position of women. A demonic and promiscuous nature is ascribed as their lot due to the *karma* that produces a female birth (e.g. notes 6,9); yet they must suppress it all in favour of their function as wives. But whereas the (ordinary) demon or *apsaras* is faced with an ethical conflict — ordained evil (i.e. *svadharma*, including *svabhāva*) versus aspiration to goodness (*sanātanadharma*) — women are caught in a trap caused entirely by *karma*. Their position is more akin to that of the half-breed demon priest (cf. O'Flaherty 1976:137ff.). For both Viśvarūpa (see Mbh.XII.329.17–30; Bhāg.P.VI.7.2–40, etc.) and Vṛtra (see Sk.P.VI.269.16–60), a demonic *svabhāva* (their maternal heritage) is in direct opposition to the *svadharma* of brahmin priest (their paternal heritage). Quite apart from the fact that such unions are in accordance with the principles of *anuloma* marriage (cf. PVK.II.1.52), it is no surprise — in view of the orthodox attitude towards women — to find that in each case the demon priest is born of a demon mother and a brahmin father: inheriting demonic qualities from one's mother fits. This pattern is reinforced by the widespread notion that a child's heart is born of its mother (see section IV, pp. 289–90). Conflict is inevitable; both Viśvarūpa and Vṛtra are doomed. No wonder that Śrī, goddess of fortune and model for the Hindu wife (see section IIA, pp.60–3) remarks that no one knows if she is demonic or divine, and she is called 'intolerable' (*duḥsahā*; Mbh.XII.218.7–8). Theoretically, at least, her position is indeed intolerable. Hence the need for Tryambaka to address himself to the problem.

But how might such a problem be resolved? It seems that there is

a basic binary division of opinion: those who dispute that women are wicked, whether on rationalistic or apologetic grounds; and those who, while allowing exceptions at the level of individual or class, insist that they are.

Of the two ways of disputing the thesis that women are wicked, perhaps the least popular is the rationalistic approach. This is pursued, for example, by Varāhamihira in his classical work on omens,⁴⁷ the *Brhatsamhitā*, written in the sixth century A.D. In his section in praise of women (*strīpraśamsā*), Varāhamihira rejects the traditional view of the inherent sinfulness of women on the grounds that it is not true. First, he argues that the three religious goals of man — *dharma*, *artha* and *kāma* — all depend on women. For women provide men with sons; they are the incarnation of Lakṣmī, goddess of prosperity, in the home (cf. section IIA, pp.59–64); and they are the source of sexual pleasure.⁴⁸ Next, he condemns those men who, having chosen the ascetic (*vairāgya*) path for themselves, seek to persuade others to follow them by denigrating women and ignoring their good qualities.⁴⁹ Finally, he asks what faults normally attributed to women are not committed — and more brazenly — by men (Br.Sam.74.6). For example, marital fidelity is the duty of both husband and wife, infidelity equally sinful in either case; since women are faithful more often than their husbands are, it follows that women are superior (Br.Sam.74.12). Verse 14 adds that men are faithful out of impotence (*aśaktyā*⁵⁰), women by their strength of will (*dhairyena*). Similarly, a man utters endearments to his wife in private but forgets her when she dies; but when the man dies, his wife is so filled with gratitude for their life together that she embraces his corpse upon the fire (Br.Sam.74.16). Varāhamihira con-

47. Traditionally, *vyotīṣāstra* is divided into three major subjects or *skandhas*: *samhitā* (omens or divination), *gaṇita* (astronomy) and *horā* (astrology). For a further classification of the areas covered by *vyotīṣāstra*, see Pingree 1981.

48. *tadartham dharmārthau sutaviśayasaukhyāni ca tato / grhe lakṣmyo mānyāḥ satatam ubalā mānavibhavaḥ* // Br.Sam.74.4c-d. For the joys of sex, enjoyed by every being from Brahmā to worms, see Br.Sam.74.18–20.

49. *ye 'py anganānām pravādanti doṣān vairāgyamārgena guṇān vihāya / te dūrjanā me manaso vitarkaḥ sadbhāvaavākyaṇi na tāni teṣām* // Br.Sam.74.5.

50. I have followed the reading given in the Bangalore and Calcutta edns. (*tatrāśaktyā*, 74.14) rather than that in the Benares edn. (*tatra śaktyā*, 73.14).

cludes that the abuse heaped on women is the measure not of the wickedness of women but of the audacity of wicked men (*dhārṣṭyam asādhūnām*). They are like thieves who, in the very act of stealing (*muṣṇatām iva caurānām*), jabber 'Stop thief!' to put the blame elsewhere.⁵¹

Yudhiṣṭhira displays an equally rational attitude when he asks Bhīṣma to explain what is meant by the joint practice of religious duties (*sahadharma*) by husband and wife after marriage (Mbh.XIII.19.1). *Sahadharma* is said to lead to heaven but, as Yudhiṣṭhira points out, husband and wife usually die at different times (Mbh.XIII.19.3b–4). Furthermore, the heaven or hell one goes to depends on the actions of each separate individual (Mbh.XIII.19.5). Even more to the point, both the *ṛsis* and the Veda declare women to be wicked (*anṛtāḥ*), so how can there be joint practice of *dharma* when the man is good and his wife is bad (Mbh.XIII.19.6–7)? Unfortunately, this eminently reasonable question does not elicit the answer it deserves. Bhīṣma embarks instead on the lengthy story of Aṣṭāvakra and the venerable female ascetic⁵² to whom he is sent in preparation for his marriage. Despite her advanced age, the ascetic repeatedly attempts to seduce him, assuring him all the while that for women there is no greater delight and no more destructive urge than sex (Mbh.XIII.20.59–60, 64–7); that even very old women are consumed by sexual passion (Mbh.XIII.22.4–5); that (a woman's) sexual desire can never be overcome in all the three worlds (Mbh.XIII.22.9). At last, duly enlightened as to the true nature of women—including the evident fact that even after initiation and the taking of ascetic vows, even in extreme old age, a woman cannot overcome her lustful nature—Aṣṭāvakra returns to marry his bride. Like Yudhiṣṭhira, we have forgotten the question. The rational approach is once more engulfed by prejudice.

The apologetic approach is taken by the exponents of *mīmāṃsā*. The original concern of this school was the detailed investigation of *dharma*, primarily as enjoined in Vedic texts but extended to include *dharmasāstra* too (see section I, p.41). For example, Jai.

51. *aho dhārṣṭyam asādhūnām ninditām anaghāḥ striyaḥ / muṣṇatām iva caurānām tiṣṭha caure 'ti jalpatām* // Br.Saṃ.74.15.

52. ... *tatrā druṣṭvā vai striyam // tapasvinīm mahābhāgām vṛddhām dīkṣām anuṣṭhitām* // Mbh.XIII.19.23–4. As the story progresses, however, she is repeatedly referred to simply as 'woman' (*strī*).

I.3.1–2 rules that *śābda* (i.e. *smṛti*) is authoritative in so far as it is based on *śruti*; Śābara that *smṛti* is both authoritative (*pramāṇam smṛtiḥ*; Śāb. on Jai.I.3.2) and equal to the Veda (*vedatulyā hi smṛtiḥ*, Śāb. on Jai.VI.2.2; cf. Kum.Ta.I.3, *adhi*. 1–3). This in turn rests on the premise, first outlined in the *Jaiminīyasūtra* (approximately second century B.C.), that the Veda is eternal, self-existent and authoritative. Vedic utterances—all of which are held to be eternally valid—are divided into three kinds. The initial division is twofold: *mantra* and *brāhmaṇa* (Jai.II.1.32–3; Kum.Ta.II.1, *adhi*. 11). The latter (i.e. real meaning) subdivides into *vidhi* and *arthavāda*. Elsewhere, the Veda is divided into five parts: *vidhi*, *arthavāda*, *mantra*, *nāmadheya* and *pratiśedha* (e.g. Arthas.p.3; cf. PVK V.ii. 1098, 1225). Mantras are technically valid but without any real meaning: the three *samhitās* (*Rg*-, *Yajur*- and *Sāmaveda*) are thus bracketed out as they do not need to be understood (cf. Kum.Ta.I.2, *adhi*. 4). Ritual utterances consist of injunctions (*vidhi*) that must be taken literally (*karmakāṇḍa*); they refer to matters beyond our experience and so may not be questioned. Non-ritual utterances (glossed as *arthavāda*, exaggerated descriptions or explanations) must be understood in a non-literal sense (*jñānakāṇḍa*); they relate to matters within our experience and are therefore open to verification. If an *arthavāda* statement is contradicted by experience, then—in theory—preference should be given to the latter. However, since by definition the Veda contains no false statements, the contradiction itself is deemed an illusion: when the correct interpretation is found, it will cease to appear. The classic example is the statement that 'the sacrificial post is the sun' (*ādityo yupaḥ*, Śāb. on Jai.I.4.12.23; *Mīmāṃsākośa* II.p.909). The identity of post and sun is evidently false: it is therefore to be interpreted as a rhetorical device to glorify the post with a view to encouraging the appropriate sacrifice.

The interpretation laid on the repeated abuse of women is merely one more example of the kind of special pleading to which the exponents of *mīmāṃsā* are driven by their need to find all Vedic utterances true. *Arthavāda* is further divided into four subgroups: praise (*stuti*), intended to flatter the recipient into correct behaviour; condemnation (*nindā*), intended to frighten him/her into abandoning evil behaviour; the actions of others (*parakṛti*), to point moral lessons; and the customs of a previous age (*purākalpa*), acceptable

then but not now.⁵³ The rhetoric of praise is well known, especially in the case of brahmins. For example, a brahmin's words are never untrue (Viṣ.Sm.19.22); whether he is learned or not, a brahmin is a great deity (Manu IX.315); whatever defects exist in a *vrata*, in *tapas*, or in sacrificial ritual, they all disappear when brahmins support them (Par.Sm.VI.52); and so on.

The *mīmāṃsā* attitude to *nindā* is summed up by Śabara's maxim: condemnation (*nindā*) is not intended simply to condemn what is condemnable but to enjoin and praise its opposite.⁵⁴ According to this view, therefore, Manu is not claiming that women are promiscuous, uncaring, vain and lazy (e.g. notes 9–10)—for all such statements may be falsified by experience—but that they should endeavour to be faithful, loving, modest and hard-working. It is, in effect, a rhetorical device for social control.

This is an attractive interpretation. Certainly, Manu himself declares that only one who investigates the pronouncements of the *ṛṣis* (*ārṣa*) and the teachings on *dharma* by means of reasoning that is consistent with the system of the Veda (glossed by the commentators as the rules of *mīmāṃsā*) can be said to understand *dharma*.⁵⁵ But, *pace* R.M.Das (e.g. 1962:12; where he claims that the *nindā* ruling makes it unnecessary to invoke different levels or periods of teaching to explain contradictory *śloka*s), the *mīmāṃsā* ruling on *nindā* does not automatically dissolve the problem. For, if *nindā* were a routine method of exhortation, then women would not be singled out to receive it. *Snātakas*, for example, would not merely be told to avoid acquiring wealth through forbidden occupations (Manu IV.15) or to avoid attachment to sensual pleasures (Manu IV.16); they would—as a purely rhetorical device—be condemned for having 'a natural tendency' to put wealth before duty, or for being un-

53. *Mīmāṃsāparibhāṣā* pp.27–8 (cited PVK V.ii.1242); Vāy.P.59.134–7. For *parakṛti* and *purākalpa*, see Jai.VI.7.26,30; Kum.Ta.I.2, *adhi*.I, *sū*.7. For some examples of *parakṛti*, see Manu X.105–8; Medh. on Manu II.151 and X.105–8. *Arthavāda* may also be given a threefold classification: *guṇavāda*, *anuvāda*, and *bhūtārthavāda* or *vidyamānavāda* (Medh. on Manu II.227; Śab. on Jai.I.4.23; Arthas.p.26).

54. *na hi nindā nindyam ninditum prayujyate || kim tarhi / ninditād itarat prasaṃsitum / tatra na ninditasya pratiśedho gamyate kin tv itarasya vidhiḥ ||* Śab. on Jai.II.4.20. Cf. Kum.Ta.I.2, *adhi*.I, *sū*.7.

55. *ārṣaṃ dharmopadeśaṃ ca vedaśāstrāvirodhinā / yas tarkeṇānusandhatte sa dharmam veda netarah ||* Manu XII.106. Cf. Medh., Kull., Rāgh..

duly attached to the senses 'by nature'. The various rulings on brahmins, *kṣatriyas* and *vaiśyas*, or even students, hermits and ascetics, would include digressions on the 'natural dispositions' of the types involved, exhorting them to appropriate action by means of condemnation. But this is not the case. Even *sūdras* receive instructions or threats rather than direct condemnation. For example, they are told that they may not accumulate wealth (Manu X.129), that they may not hear, learn, recite or teach the Veda (Manu III.156, IV.99, X.127; Gaut.XII.4–6); but they are not actually described as being 'by nature' acquisitive or ambitious beyond their station. Only women are repeatedly instructed by means of direct condemnation. So selective an application of *nindā* suggests that it is in practice far more than a rhetorical device: it rests on prejudice.

Of the two main approaches supporting the thesis that women are wicked, the response of social psychology to prejudice can hardly be avoided. According to this kind of attitude, the 'good Jew' is merely the exception to an otherwise rigid antisemitism; the intelligent black merely the exception to an otherwise acknowledged racial inferiority. Neither individual constitutes a refutation of the prejudice concerning his class: the exception to it is marvelled at instead. In the realm of women, this is perhaps the majority view. All the examples that Tryambaka quotes from the *Rāmāyaṇa* fall into this category. Kausalyā complains that, unlike the faithful and devoted Sītā, most women are inconstant (notes 11,12). Agastya heaps abuse on women in general before exonerating Sītā from blame (notes 13–15). He also compliments Sītā by comparing her behaviour to the wicked ways of other women (note 16). In the *Mahābhārata*, Bhīṣma expounds this view. When Yudhiṣṭhira questions him concerning *sahadharma*, Bhīṣma reverts to prejudice, declaring (in the words of the female ascetic) that women are obsessed with sex: only one in a thousand, or perhaps even one in hundreds of thousands, will be devoted to her husband, a *pativrata* (Mbh.XIII.20.65). It is this same prejudice that persuades the common man today that 'the exception proves the rule' in the incorrect sense that it 'establishes' that rule instead of 'testing' or refuting it.

A dramatic example of this viewpoint is found in Yaśaścandra's play entitled *Mudritakumudacandraprakaraṇa*. The play is set in the court of Siddharāja Jayasīṃha, the great Cālukya king of northern Gujarat (A.D. 1094–1143). Act V presents a debate between the

leaders of the two rival sects of Jainism: Kumudacandra is the head of the Digambaras, Devasuri that of the Śvetāmbaras, while Siddharāja takes the chair. The issue under discussion is whether or not women can attain salvation. According to the Digambaras, they cannot; according to the Śvetāmbaras, they can. The latter view maintains that, while salvation is beyond the capacities of most women, it is within the reach of those few possessed of *sattva* (the quality of purity or goodness). Devasuri cites as evidence women from mythology (such as Sītā) and from the contemporary world (such as Mayaṇallā, the queen-mother, who ruled as regent for many years while Siddharāja was a boy). The discussion reveals the two opposing poles of prejudice: the reverence shown to a few individual idealized women (whether real or mythical), and the contempt shown to women in general (*Mudritakumudacandraprakaraṇa* V; cf. Sandesara 1953:362–3).

The second approach in support of the thesis that women are wicked also allows exceptions, but on the level of a class or type of woman rather than an individual. This view takes up the radical—if theoretically illogical—distinction between a woman's nature (*strīsvabhāva*) and her ordained function as wife (*strīdharma*), and pits one against the other. All fear and condemnation is directed at women as biological creatures, representatives of wild or untamed nature. Hence the pollution taboos surrounding the physical aspects of being female: menstruation, sexuality, childbirth. Hence the condemnation of female emotion and passion. All praise is directed at women as social entities, paragons of virtue in whom the biological is tamed and controlled. This tension between 'culture' and 'nature', between 'society' and 'the wild', is a familiar one to social anthropologists (e.g. E. Ardener 1975; Okely 1975). For any class, race or even nation outside the self-imposed barriers of a given group may be classified as 'the wild'; women, gypsies or the Japanese. Both fascinating and terrifying, women as women are condemned. But if they allow themselves to be controlled by their ordained function as wives, the condemnation reserved for women no longer applies.

This is evidently Tryambaka's own advice. If, by the appropriate behaviour, women transform themselves into devoted wives, then the inherent evil of their female natures—the 'inauspicious marks' (*alakṣaṇam*) of a female birth—will be annulled (note 41). Tryambaka's treatise describes precisely how this miracle may be wrought.

IV. The Duties Common to (all) Women (*strīṇām sādharmaṇā dharmāḥ*; Sdhp.22r.8–48v.6)

I shall present the remainder of Tryambaka's lengthy treatise in the form of a summary. This fourth section is divided into nine major topics, following Tryambaka's own rather loose subdivisions.

General rulings on behaviour (Sdhp.22r.9–25r.10)

Many of the quotations in this section have been quoted verbatim in earlier ones. For example, a woman should not expose her navel, ankles or breasts (Sdhp.22r.10–23v.1 = Sdhp.7r.5–6, section IIA, p.90, note 69). She should wear *haridrā*, collyrium, *kun-kuma*, *sindūra*, a short-sleeved bodice and so on (Sdhp.22v.5–7 = Sdhp.7r.9–7v.1; section IIA, p.96, note 73). Without being told to do so, she should make ready all the items for worship (Sdhp.23r.7–9 = Sdhp.12v.6–8, 4r.3–4; section IIC, p.179, note 35). She should eat her husband's left-overs, saying 'This is a great *prasāda*!' (Sdhp.23r.9–10 = Sdhp.18r.6–7; section IIC, p.222, note 108). She should never be alone, nor bathe naked (Sdhp.23v.7 = Sdhp.6v.8; section IIA, p.84, note 63); and so on.

Others reinforce rulings already given and are discussed in the relevant sections. For example, she should never answer back even when scolded, nor show her anger or resentment even when beaten (Sdhp.23r.4–5; see section IID, pp.242–3). She should not go to festivals or public gatherings, on pilgrimages, or to such things as weddings or public shows (Sdhp.23v.2; see section IIB, p.137, note 38). If she wants to bathe in a sacred place, she should drink the water used to bathe her husband's feet, for her own husband is superior to even Śaṅkara or Viṣṇu (Sdhp.23v.10–24r.1; see section IIB, p.137, note 39). The good wife never loves another man whether he bribes her with fine things, begs her humbly, or seizes her by force; if he looks at her, she does not meet his eyes; if he smiles at her, she does not smile back; if he speaks to her, she does not answer (Sdhp.24.1–5; see section IIC, p.175); and so on.

In addition, we may note the following rulings that are representative of this section. According to a quotation attributed to Āśvalā-